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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

Thursday 13 December 2007

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Jeudi 13 décembre 2007

**Standing committee on
public accounts**

Organization

**Comité permanent des
comptes publics**

Organisation

Chair: Norman W. Sterling
Clerk: Katch Koch

Président : Norman W. Sterling
Greffier : Katch Koch

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC ACCOUNTSCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
COMPTES PUBLICS

Thursday 13 December 2007

Jeudi 13 décembre 2007

The committee met at 1004 in committee room 1.

ELECTION OF CHAIR

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Katch Koch): Good morning, honourable members. Welcome to the standing committee on public accounts. It is my duty to call upon you to elect a Chair. Are there any nominations?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'll nominate Norm Sterling.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Katch Koch): Mr. Sterling, do you accept the nomination?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Graciously, yes.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: If you'd said anything else I'd come over and throttle you. That shouldn't be on Hansard, should it?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Katch Koch): Are there any other nominations?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I move the nominations be closed.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Katch Koch): There being no further nominations, I declare the nominations closed and Mr. Sterling elected Chair of the committee. Mr. Sterling, would you take the chair, please.

Applause.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Firstly, I'd like to thank Mr. Hardeman for leading the applause on my appointment.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you.

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Next we have the election of the Vice-Chair. Do we have nominations?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Yes. I'd like to nominate Jerry Ouellette as the Vice-Chair of public accounts.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Are there further nominations? There being no further nominations, I declare nominations closed. Mr. Ouellette, congratulations on being elected as Vice-Chair.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Thank you very much.

APPOINTMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): The third point of business is to appoint the subcommittee to deal with committee business.

Mr. David Zimmer: I move that the subcommittee on committee business be appointed to meet from time to time at the call of the Chair or at the request of any member thereof to consider and report to the committee on the business of the committee; that the presence of all members of the subcommittee is necessary to constitute a meeting; and that the subcommittee be composed of the following members of the public accounts committee: the Chair as Chair; Mrs. Sandals, Mr. Hardeman, Ms. Horwath; and that substitution be permitted on the subcommittee.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Any discussion or comments? There being none, all those in favour of the motion? Carried.

That ends the formal part of the meeting.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): I thought there should be a little bit of discussion vis-à-vis the interim schedule before we reconvene. I'm informed by the clerk that we have three brand new researchers who are going to be working with the committee. I think it would be important for us to indicate as early as possible what our areas of interest in the auditor's report might be so that we could indicate to the researchers what areas they might start working on in terms of the report. So I suggest that the subcommittee meet immediately after the general meeting of the committee, but perhaps, Katch, you could introduce the researcher with us today and the other researchers who will be working with us as well.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Katch Koch): Okay. I have to my right Susan Viets. Susan has been with the assembly for—

Ms. Susan Viets: Since February.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Katch Koch): Since February. She came from the private sector. To assist Susan, we have Anne Marzalik and Lorraine Luski.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Before the subcommittee meets, I did indicate to the House leaders that we might want to meet in the interim between now and March 17. While we've got the committee here, are there dates when people have plans, either out of the

country or on vacation or whatever? If there are bad dates, I'd like to know what they are. Maria, do you have some—

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: January, for the most part.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Okay. Any other times? My preference, in terms of my own personal preference, would be to try to arrange it somewhere around when ROMA is—is ROMA in Toronto this year?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): And when is it?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: The last weekend of February, I believe.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Yes, usually around the 21st.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: It's the ROMA and Good Roads conference together. I think it starts the last Sunday in February.

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The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): My inclination would be to try to group it around that time, when we're going to be in Toronto anyway, and that we do that.

What is the feeling of the committee in terms of the number of days you would like to put in during this period of time? Normally, Laura, we spend one day on each section of the report. We start usually at 9 o'clock in the morning, have a briefing, and then call in the ministry—is it at 10?

Mr. Jim McCarter: Usually I do the briefing from 9 till, say, 9:30 or 9:45. The ministry—or it could be the hospitals or universities—are on call about 9:30. So they know to be ready about 9:30 and we call them in between 9:30 and 9:45. It could be close to 10, depending on how long the briefing takes.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Then we normally work till about noontime, and the odd time we have had to come back after lunch. We normally serve something here, a sandwich or something, and have a short lunch and then go back at it around 1 o'clock. In a lot of the cases we've been finished by noontime or shortly thereafter, but we have come back, I think, on one or two occasions.

Mr. Jim McCarter: Yes, maybe once; usually it's been wrapped up by 12 or 12:15. Often we'll get a sandwich and come back and the committee will give some advice to the researcher with respect to whether they want a report, and if so, what is the thrust of some of the recommendations.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): We've normally aimed at having nine sections dealt with in the auditor's report and nine reports on those hearings. So there are two parts to the process. One is having the hearing at the beginning, where we have the ministry people come in and we question them. The second part is writing the report, and that takes some time. The researcher prepares a draft report after hearing what we say at the end of the hearing. Then we go through several drafts of the report; it takes us two to three cracks—three

cracks normally—at most reports. So that process usually takes us into the fall of the year and maybe the last couple of reports. We try to finish it off before the auditor would come forward with his next report in December.

Each party has three choices and we rotate on that. I gave Dave Zimmer a call in your caucus and Andrea a call with regard to what their first couple of choices might be. I don't think we have to make the third choice yet. We're probably not going to get into that until we return on March 17.

What is the desire of the committee in terms of how many days you would like to meet during the break? Yes, Liz?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My recollection from some past times is we tried to do three days on one week when the House wasn't sitting. We did Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and just did three different sets of hearings. That gave the researchers time to go away, and then when we came back to sit again there was an opportunity to have some work done. That certainly would give us enough hearings that the researchers would have some work to start. They're not going to get that far ahead on the work anyway. So three would seem to be about the maximum number of days. My recollection is it was probably easier to do three days at once.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Okay. So let's tentatively look at February 26, 27 and 28.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Maybe we should sort this out, Norm, in the subcommittee.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Yes.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I understand you want to be with ROMA but in terms of the researchers actually getting a start on work, would we be better to look around about the first or second week of February so that the researchers—the point of doing it when the House isn't sitting is to let the researchers get started on it, and they can't start if we don't do the hearings.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): They do most of their research prior to the hearings.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: No, but in terms of starting to do report writing.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Oh, report writing. Okay.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: In timing, if we're going to do it the last week of February, there's not much more time to do it than those three days.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: No, I was saying, do we want to do three days—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Because we're going to be back here mid-March, so we're only talking two weeks from the time we're setting up the meetings to the end of the recess.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: That's what I was saying. If we want to do three days, it might be better to do it about the first or second week of February. Then the researchers can go away and have some time to do the follow-up writing.

Mr. David Zimmer: The last week in February I'm out of the country.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Okay. Well, how about starting on my birthday, February 19?

Mr. Phil McNeely: That's good. We'll have a party.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): I like red wine. Oh, this is on Hansard. I should be careful here.

Okay, let's check our schedules. The subcommittee will meet and then I will talk to the whips. There may be some conflicts with other committees too.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Chair, as a member of the subcommittee, I can't meet after this. This meeting was scheduled to be now. I have to be in the House speaking in a moment, so I can't be here for a subcommittee following this meeting right now.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Okay, that's fine. Jerry Ouellette will sub in for you. Thanks very much, Ernie.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Ernie, just before you go, are there any weeks in February that you're not available?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm always available.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): Okay, I think we've got sort of a feel. Jim, did you want to make any comments vis-à-vis the report this year?

Mr. Jim McCarter: No, other than to say that we had 14—even though it's called the public accounts committee, typically we don't spend a lot of time on public accounts. We pick sections in the value-for-money audit work we did, and we did 14 value-for-money audits this year. As well, in the past the committee has also done follow-up work. Two years after we do an audit we do follow-up work, so we have follow-up sections. It's more of a review than an audit, but we do follow-up sections. In the past I know the committee has from time to time also picked sections from those follow-up chapters, as well as the current 14 value-for-money audits. So basically that's generally where you're selecting from.

The Chair (Mr. Norman W. Sterling): So we will, through your representatives, let you know what the decisions are with regard to the subcommittee and the subjects of interest, and then we'll inform the researchers as to the ones we will choose for the February hearings, and then also give some indication of what the first couple of weeks when we get back in March might be.

Any further business? The meeting is adjourned and the subcommittee will meet here immediately after.

The committee adjourned at 1019.

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Chair / Président

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Carleton–Mississippi Mills PC)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Président

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa PC)

Mrs. Laura Albanese (York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston L)

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford PC)

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre ND)

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans L)

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa PC)

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph L)

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Carleton–Mississippi Mills PC)

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex L)

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale L)

Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes

Mr. Jim McCarter, Auditor General

Clerk / Greffier

Mr. Katch Koch

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Susan Viets, research officer,
Research and Information Services